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Standards of Placing-Out, Supervision and After-Care of Dependent Children



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FOREWORD

"Do you like it here, Tommy?" a worker in a children's society asked a ten year old boy whom she had recently transferred from a children's institution to a private boarding home.

"Yes'm", he replied enthusiastically, adding shyly and pointing towards his caretaker, "She puts her hands on me the way boys' mothers do."

"You see, Miss X," the delighted foster mother cried, "It's more than washing and ironing and cooking that young ones need!"

It was a recognition of this fundamental need of children for individual attention and for mothering that led to the development of foster home care for dependent children. For nearly fifty years this form of child care has been used by certain societies and their example is being followed by an increasing number of children's institutions and agencies. There is more and more a feeling that "home grown children" are after all the best product. Methods of placing out, however, have changed through the past years just as methods of caring for the sick have changed. The serious responsibility involved in finding the right environment for the individual child is increasingly recognized, together with the necessity of establishing good standards of work.

In 1915 a special committee made up of workers in societies and institutions for dependent and delinquent children submitted to the New York State Conference of Charities and Corrections a report called, "Standards of Placing-out, Supervision and After-Care." This report was not only adopted by the State Conference but by the State Convention of County Superintendents of the Poor as well.

It was evident that this formation of standards met a long-felt need among children worker's, for it was rapidly adopted by other States and now forms the basis of work of most of the modern child-caring agencies throughout the country.

In answer to the many inquiries concerning methods of placing out and after care that the Bureau of Children of the Department of Public Welfare receives, it has been decided to reprint for distribution in this State the original report of the New York Committee. With certain modifications to meet Pennsylvania conditions it is herewith submitted to the children's workers of the Commonwealth in the hope that it will prove helpful to them in their important and delicate task of transplanting human lives.



STANDARDS OF PLACING-OUT, SUPERVISION AND AFTER-CARE.

1. STANDARDS OF PLACING OUT.

1. What constitutes an adequate investigation of a home?
 2. Must an adequate investigation include a personal visit to the home by a personal representative of the placing-out agency?
 3. What are the things which such a personal visit, if necessary, should include in the way of inspection and inquiry?
- 1, 2 and 3. An adequate investigation should be made before a child is placed in any home. It should include—
- (a) The filling out by the applicant of a blank to be signed by both husband and wife, application stating the essential facts in regard to the proposed home and foster parents;
 - (b) Written reports from the references given by the applicant and usually from independent references, and,
 - (c) A personal visit by a representative of the placing-out agency to the home of the applicant. A personal interview should be held with the foster-mother and with the foster father, if practicable.

The *facts* collected by the investigator should usually include the sex, age, character, habits, health, temperament and occupation of each member of the family, general standards of the home and neighborhood, distance to school and to church, living conditions, such as sleeping arrangements, sanitation, ventilation, cleanliness and comfort; the financial status of the family, including the approximate amount of the annual income and its sources, opportunities for advancement, savings, insurance, etc.; the family's social connections and amusements; their moral and religious standards; motive in taking a child and their attitude toward discipline of a child, and the possibilities for recreation. At least three references, people who have known the family intimately for a period of at least three years and within the past five years, should be visited.

4. Should references be required in addition to those given by the applicant?

References known independently to be reliable and of good standing, in addition to those given by the applicant, should be had when possible. Whenever any substantial doubt is suggested in the course of an investigation, the matter should be pursued until the doubt is removed or the undesirability of the home is established.

5. Should references be seen in person in every case, or is correspondence with the references sufficient?

The references given by the applicant, or independent references, or other persons of standing in the community should always be seen personally.

6. Assuming that an adequate system of investigation is established and thereby the true facts in regard to the homes secured, what are to be considered minimum standards by which homes are accepted or rejected from the point of view of:

(a) Income.

A family must have sufficient income to provide adequate housing and living conditions. If board is paid for children cared for by the family the money so received should not be the chief source of income.

(b) Intelligence. (Including the education of foster parents and also the educational opportunities likely to be offered to the child.)

No definite amount of education should be demanded. The families should be sufficiently intelligent to appreciate the value of regular mental and vocational training, to teach the child practical, every-day matters of decent living and to give the child moral protection. Decided preference should be given to families of some degree of natural refinement.

(c) Moral Standards.

1. Honesty in business and personal relation is essential.

2. No home should be accepted where any member of the family is not living in accordance with the usual American standards of social and personal morality.

3. Profanity alone (unless indulged in habitually and in the home) does not necessarily make a home unusable. If it indicates vulgarity and a generally low moral standard, the home should be rejected.

(d) Religious Training.

Children should be placed with individuals of the same religious faith as the parents of the child unless for compelling reasons this is found to be impracticable. Opportunity for religious training should always be required.

7. Should standards higher than the minimum be required in regard to homes for certain classes of children? If so, what classes of children, and what standards?

For a child of general marked promise, a home should be selected where more than the minimum amount of required education will be given the child, and where he will be surrounded by refinement and culture. Children with a talent of any kind should be placed where that talent can best be developed. For a child needing special physical care a home which is especially equipped to meet the need should be selected. A difficult child requiring expert training needs a home where the person in charge of the child has had some special training or is temperamentally fitted to deal intelligently and sympathetically with him.

8. How far should inquiries be pushed in regard to the parentage and family connections of children who are to be offered to foster parents?

The investigation of the family history of a child should include all the data which can be obtained in regard to the parents, brothers, sisters, and grandparents of the child. Honest and earnest efforts should be made by personal visit and by correspondence to secure this information. There should also be secured such facts as may be readily obtainable in regard to aunts, uncles and other relatives.

In regard to the child's immediate family, *i. e.*: parents, brothers, sisters and grandparents, the facts should, whenever possible, include the following: the name, former and last known address, with date; whether living or dead; if dead, date and cause of death; nationality; race; religion; occupation; health; mentality; habits; moral character; prominent traits; personal description; social and moral standards of the family, etc. Any indications of abnormality should be noted. The housing and neighborhood conditions and the standards of home life should be recorded, as well as the child's characteristics and personal history. The sources of information should be given with full name and address, and if an official, the title of the person from whom the information is secured.

9. What must we require of the children in the way of:

(a) Health.

A placing-out institution or society should be fully informed by a competent physician concerning the physical condition of each child who is to be placed. No child suffering from an infectious or contagious disease which would endanger others should be placed. Children suffering from a physical defect, who are not a menace to the community, may be placed in specially chosen homes.

(b) Mentality.

No child should be deprived of an opportunity for family life merely because of the fact that he is peculiar, backward, retarded in school, or mentally slower than the ordinary child of his age. Border-line and doubtful cases of mental ability should be placed in boarding homes rather than free homes, and under special supervision, pending determination of their mental status. Children pronounced by competent authorities to be definitely feeble-minded should be placed in suitable institutions. In the absence of adequate institutional provision, boarding in carefully selected families may be the next best alternative.

(c) Character and Disposition.

No child should be deprived of a trial in a family home because of an undesirable disposition or unfortunate habits, unless such disposition and habits constitute a source of actual danger to himself or to others in the community, which cannot be overcome by home life under ordinary conditions. A child whose conduct may be an actual danger to others, under the ordinary conditions of family life, should either be placed in a family home selected for its ability to afford special supervision, or in a correc-

tional school. Border-line and doubtful cases should be under special supervision both by the family and by the placing-out agency, pending determination of the necessity of commitment.

(d) Heredity.

A child, both of whose parents are obviously feeble-minded, or have been pronounced feeble-minded by competent authorities, should not be placed in a free home for adoption, but may be boarded in a family under careful supervision until the mental capacity of the child is clearly established.

A child one or both of whose parents are epileptic, insane, of weak or degenerate stock, or of doubtful mentality, or who are reputed to be feeble-minded, should not be placed in a free home for adoption until such child has reached an age at which his mental, moral and physical status can be reasonably determined; he then should be dealt with on the basis of his individual capacity and not on the basis of his heredity.

A child who is physically deformed should not be placed for adoption unless the prospective foster parents are able and willing to furnish medical and surgical aid, and, further, that a reputable physician, in writing, certifies that such child with ordinary care and treatment can become self-supporting by the time he reaches his majority.

10. What should be required as to legal custody, commitment, surrender, etc.?

A child who is to be placed in a free home with a view of permanence should either have been

- (a) Legally surrendered by the parents or surviving parent, or
- (b) Removed from their custody as improper guardians by an order of the court.

But in either case separation, with view to a permanent free foster home, should only be made after investigation has shown that the parents are not "fit, competent and able to fully maintain, support and educate such child," and that there is no reasonable probability that these disabilities will ever be overcome. A full statement should be placed on record of the conditions which necessitated the separation of the child from its parents, the legal process by which such separation was made, and, if the separation occurred more than three months previously, of the present whereabouts, circumstances and conduct of the parents.

11. When a placed-out child not legally adopted is returned by the foster parents, who is responsible for its support?

A person should be maintained by the town, city or county in which he has a legal settlement, and the legal settlement of a minor is that of the father, if living, or if not, of the mother. Morally, the obligation of a community to provide for a dependent child does

not cease because it may be desirable to provide a home for the child in some other community. When a child who has been placed in a free home is returned and must be supported either temporarily or permanently, that support should be provided by the locality from which he came if his settlement there can be determined. If not, the institution or society which placed him out must assume the responsibility of his care.

II. Standards of Supervision.

1. What should supervision include in the nature of:

- (a) Personal visits by responsible trained agents. How often?

Personal visits by responsible trained agents should be made as a rule *at least* twice a year. In cases where there is discontent on either side, or doubt as to the desirability of the home, they should be made as often as necessary.

- (b) Correspondence with the foster parents or the child?

Friendly and, in some cases, instructive correspondence should be carried on with the foster parents. If the child is placed in a home when from six to twelve years of age, friendly correspondence may be useful. In the case of a child placed when twelve years of age or older, correspondence with the child should always be maintained.

- (c) Correspondence with school teachers?

Correspondence with school teachers of children of school age is desirable, unless in exceptionally good homes where families prefer not to have the teacher know that the child is not their own. The school report should give a record of the child's formal school progress, his attendance and general position in the community.

2. What should be the character of a visit of supervision?

Before visiting a child, the agent should review the child's history, and also the original investigation of the home, noting any points suggesting further inquiry. When a child is visited, the agent should observe carefully the condition of the child, his health, his clothing, his attitude toward the foster parents, whether or not the child is happy, the amount of work he does, his progress in education, where and with whom he sleeps, his opportunities for play and possibilities for social life. The agent should also note the condition of the home, particularly as to cleanliness, order, comfort, the foster parents' attitude toward the child, their method of discipline, their plans for the child's future. Any changes in the home or home life should be noted. Agents should be instructed not only to gather information, but to give constructive advice to the family and child. Any child over eight years of age when placed should be interviewed alone. If any question arises as to the home or child, some responsible person in the community familiar with conditions in the home should be interviewed.

3. How long should such responsible supervision continue in regard to:

(a) Children who are not legally adopted.

Supervision should continue until the children reach the age of twenty-one, unless by reason of the exceptionally satisfactory character of a home and exceptionally close relation between foster parents and the child it becomes evident at an earlier date that further supervision can serve no useful purpose. The form and purpose of supervision gradually changes as the child grows older, involving more and more, as time passes, of friendly advice and counsel to the child in regard to matters of education and occupation. If the supervision is skilfully done, it gradually passes over from control to friendly counsel, as it does between parent and child. However, some supervisory contact should be kept in most cases until a child is at least eighteen years of age.

When a child has been in a home for a period of five years or more, and conditions of the home and the development of the child have been satisfactory, an annual visit may be sufficient, or in a few cases in which conditions are similar to legal adoption, the supervision may consist of correspondence only.

Supervision in case of older children should always include a consideration of the training of the child in regard to earning and spending money. If the child was placed in the home when ten or twelve years of age, some compensation for his labor may reasonably be suggested to the foster parents after he reaches the age of sixteen or seventeen, provided he is not attending school. Due allowance should be made for the period of time the child has been in the home, and the amount of expenditure the foster parents have necessarily incurred in his behalf.

As to children placed out when less than twelve years of age, the wisdom of the foster parent granting a small allowance of spending money to be used by the child in his descretion, with friendly advice, may well be suggested.

(b) Children who are legally adopted.

Responsible supervision, of course, stops when legal adoption takes place. It is desirable, however, that placing-out agencies should, when practicable, and when it can be done without danger of disturbing the relations between the child and the foster parents or the community, secure information, from time to time, as to the subsequent careers of children who are legally adopted, both for the practical reason of being able to answer criticisms as to what finally becomes of such children, and for the scientific reason of being able to form an increasingly wise judgment as time passes as to the operations of heredity and environment. Placing-out agencies should therefore be careful to place on record all information which comes to them in the ordinary course of events concerning children who have been legally adopted, and also, in

so far as it is practicable for them to do so, with the consent and approval of the foster parents, to keep informed by correspondence with the foster parents or others, as to the welfare of the child until it reaches majority, or even subsequently. Naturally, very great care must be taken to see that this is not done in such a way as to cause embarrassment either to the child or the foster parents.

4. Standards of Adoption.

- (a) How long a time should elapse after placing-out before an application for legal adoption will be considered? Should any exception to this standard period be permitted?

At least a year should elapse before consent for legal adoption is considered. Some agencies require two years.

- (b) What children, if any, should not be legally adopted?

It is wise to delay permission for legal adoption of children in whose family stock, on one or both sides, there is clear evidence of mental defect. However, if the foster parents, having been fully informed of the child's history and being sufficiently intelligent to realize the responsibility they are assuming, still desire to adopt the child and are willing that the placing-out agency should keep in sufficiently close touch with the child to be able to suggest and assist in securing custodial care for the child, should mental deficiency become apparent, consent for adoption may be given. Special effort should be made in such cases to keep informed as to the welfare of the child during minority.

- (c) What standards should be required as to families to which consent for legal adoption will be given?

The standards required as to families to which consent for legal adoption should be given are not materially different from those which should be required in case of the original placing-out. Consideration of permission for adoption should, however, include careful inquiry as to whether subsequent events have fully confirmed the judgment which approved the home originally. Consent for adoption may appropriately be delayed or withheld, if there is lack of sufficient intelligence or income in the family to give reasonable assurance of the maintenance of high standards of training and education without supervision from the placing-out agency, or if there is any doubt as to the sincerity of affection for the child, or the unselfishness of the motives for adopting. The fact that the parties desiring to adopt have expended considerable sums in maintaining a child over a period of time should not be considered in determining the fitness of such persons to become foster parents. Such persons have no right to detain a child by reason of having bestowed such care and support.

III. Standards of After-Care.

It is assumed that after definite, formal supervision is finished there will be, in some cases at least, an opportunity, and in others, perhaps, a necessity for after-care. How far should this be carried out by a society which has placed-out children in families in the following respects:

- (a) In seeking information as to the subsequent progress of children who have been legally adopted.
By consent of foster parents, supervision after adoption is desirable for both scientific and practical purposes, as in this way complete records of the child's development can be kept, and a study of these helps in making it possible to revise present methods of work in dealing with children who are placed and those who are to be selected for placing.
- (b) If this should be done at all, how should it be done, how often, and until the child reaches what age?
It should be done by correspondence and, when convenient by friendly personal visits, but care should be taken that the fact of the adoption is not disclosed or emphasized. Such visits every second year are sufficient until the child is of age and self-supporting or married. If after adoption is completed there is a radical change in the family life, such as the death of one of the foster parents, or if the child has developed in any way abnormally, regular supervision should be maintained.
- (c) In the case of children who have not been legally adopted, but who are especially promising in some line, how far should the society go in securing opportunities for special education, training or care in those lines?
As much as possible should be done in securing opportunities for special training for promising children, even after formal supervision has stopped.
- (d) In the case of children no longer under definite, formal supervision, but who have developed weaknesses or tendencies to go wrong, how far should friendly interest and informal supervision continue, and to what age?
In the case of children who have developed subnormal or abnormal tendencies, formal supervision should, if possible, continue until the child has been committed to some special institution, placed in the care of some responsible organization, or until some private individual assumes the responsibility or permanent interest.

Children Returned to Their Own Homes.

1. What constitutes an adequate investigation of an application from parents or relatives for the return of a child from the care of a society to their custody?

Before returning a child to the custody of parents, an investigation should show that they are morally and financially able to

give the child proper care, protection and training. If a child is to be returned to relatives other than parents, the investigation of the home should be as thorough as that for a free foster home.

2. Should such an investigation concern itself with any other matters than the moral suitability of the parents or relatives to look after the children?

In considering the return of a child to parents, lower economic standards can be accepted than those required in a foster home. Poverty *alone* should not, as a rule, prevent the return of a child to its parents.

3. If such an investigation should take into account the income, financial circumstances and sanitary condition of the home, should a different standard be accepted than would be required in placing-out a child in a foster home?

A lower standard can be accepted in case of children returned to parents or to older brothers or sisters, provided it is sufficiently high to assure moral protection and physical welfare.

4. After a child has been returned to his parents or relatives by a placing-out society, what degree of supervision should the society exercise over the child?

- (a) If the child has been in the care of the society for less than six months?

When a placing-out agency investigates histories of children carefully before placing them in homes, as should invariably be done, there would rarely be a sufficiently radical change in the family situation within six months to warrant the return to his parents of a child who had previously been permanently removed. If the circumstances justify the return of the child to his parents within six months, ordinarily there would be no duty of subsequent supervision. If the child is returned to other relatives, the supervision should be sufficient for a period of three years to show whether the return was justifiable, and in doubtful cases should be further continued.

- (b) If the child has been in the care of the society for longer than six months and less than three years?

Supervision should continue long enough to assure the placing-out agency that the child is properly and permanently provided for.

- (c) If the child has been in the care of the society for longer than three years?

Supervision should continue the same as if the child has been placed in a free home.

Children Placed in Employment.

When children in the care of a placing-out society reach a working age and are not permanently settled in some home, so that the foster parents feel the same responsibility that its own parents would feel as to the child's occupation and station in life, and if the children have no parents or relatives able, willing and suitable to provide for them, what standards should the society observe in finding employment for the children?

- (a) As to age at which a child is to be employed.
The laws regarding the ages of child employment should be carefully observed, and it is desirable that every child should be in school until he is at least sixteen years old.
- (b) As to the kind of work, number of hours, amount of compensation and opportunities for training and promotion.
As far as possible work should be chosen which is suited to the child's aptitude. The hours and character of employment should be clearly in accordance with the Child Labor Law of the State.
Only occupations offering definite training or advancement should be chosen. The beginning compensation may be small in such situations, but the exploitation of the child should be guarded against.
- (c) As to supervision of conditions of work to ascertain whether original arrangements are carried out.
Close supervision by trained agents should be maintained.
- (d) As to selection of suitable boarding places for children employed, and
- (e) As to subsequent supervision of life in other than working hours.
The living conditions, opportunities for social intercourse and the moral influences should be ascertained by a personal visit before placing a child in a boarding home, and enough supervision should be given afterward to be sure that the living conditions and social and moral influences remain good.

Records.

What should be regarded as the essential records to be kept in placing-out, supervision and after-care of children?

A complete record in permanent form should include all the facts collected in connection with the investigation of the family history of the child (see Standards of Placing-out, 8), with the investigation of the child's foster home (see Standards of Placing-out, 1 to 7), and with every visit made and all the correspondence in the supervision, including copies of all letters to and from the family and the child, or about them. All formal documents such as birth certificates, vaccination certificates, school cards, etc., should be filed with the child's record. Records should be kept in such a form that the information is readily accessible. Written records should be made of all important arrangements made by the placing-out society or by any of its supervising agents, either with the family or with the child.

Trained Service.

What degree of training should be required on the part of persons who are to be employed as agents for placing-out or supervision of children?

Only people of judgment, intelligence and ability to get along with different types of people are useful as children's agents. A good general education, special training or its equivalent in experi-

ence in social work, teaching, nursing, etc., should be required. A college education or training in schools for social work is desirable.

Confidential Nature of the Work.

Placing-out work is essentially confidential in its nature, and all interviews and records should be so regarded.

